

Continued Enemy Build-Up Above DMZ Reported

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 3 — Intelligence reports reaching Washington indicate a continuing North Vietnamese build-up north of the demilitarized zone and new enemy troop movements in Laos, Cambodia and the northern part of South Vietnam.

In the light of these reports, American intelligence specialists said today that the North Vietnamese retained the capability of maintaining—at least until the dry season ends next month—hit-and-run operations throughout Indochina.

The White House and the Defense Department interpret these recent attacks as an attempt to disguise losses suffered during the South Vietnamese incursion into Laos. But civilian intelligence specialists are inclined to regard the hit-and-run operations as designed to keep the Saigon Government and the United States off balance throughout Indochina.

Disagreement on Damage

At the root of this difference of interpretation is a disagreement on the damage suffered by the North Vietnamese in Laos.

The White House and the military believe that the losses were considerable and that Hanoi's ability to conduct successful operations is limited to raids of primarily psychological impact.

The civilian intelligence experts tend to suspect that

North Vietnamese capabilities are again being underestimated, although none of the intelligence men expect major offensives.

They say that Hanoi is moving some of its 100,000 troops in North Vietnam closer to the DMZ—which straddles the border—and into the zone, but possibly as many as 50,000 North Vietnamese regulars remain in northern South Vietnam and that southbound traffic has resumed to some extent over the Laotian supply trails.

New Political Effort

At the same time, they reported, North Vietnam is engaged in a major new effort to streamline its political and economic institutions as a part of what American analysts regard as plans for an indefinite pursuit of the war.

Last January, for example, the Central Committee of the North Vietnamese Workers' (Communist) party held its first publicly announced full meeting since 1964 and stressed that the war still took priority over economic development. American intelligence sources said this session might have been called in anticipation of the South Vietnamese thrust into Laos.

On April 11, North Vietnam will elect members of the National Assembly for the first time since 1964, three years behind schedule. The decision to hold the elections was announced immediately after the Laos incursion, and analysts here believe that the voting for the single list of candidates is

intended to emphasize North Vietnamese political unity.

Yesterday, the Hanoi radio announced the establishment of a high-level department to supervise agriculture and presumably to push for higher rice production. The 1970 harvest was one of the biggest in years, but North Vietnam is hoping for self-sufficiency in food.

The new disagreement over North Vietnamese plans seemed to add to the differences in the Administration over North Vietnamese intentions and capabilities.

Intelligence officials outside the White House now say that United States and South Vietnamese military intelligence may have been faulty in underestimating North Vietnam's capacity to respond to the drive into Laos, which began Feb. 8.

The officials have acknowledged in private conversation that the Laos operation was begun without an agreed intelligence estimate by United States intelligence agencies' community and that "devil's advocate" arguments by the State Department and even some officials of the Central Intelligence Agency were largely disregarded.

Discussing the present efforts to assess North Vietnamese plans, many officials said that disagreements persist along the same lines, with the White House and the Defense Department reportedly inclined to take the optimistic view.

This view, some officials

suggested privately, may relate to the Administration's position that the Laos campaign hurt the enemy badly and that, therefore, it is capable only of harassment.

President Nixon is expected to touch on these points in his speech to the nation next Wednesday, when he is to announce new withdrawals of American forces from South Vietnam.

Intelligence officials noted, however, that North Vietnam massed considerable forces above the demilitarized zone last January, presumably in anticipation of the offensive in Laos, and had strengthened its position inside the zone.

The intelligence specialists also said that North Vietnam might be engaged, through its hit-and-run attacks, in a long-range effort to interfere as much as possible with the pacification programs in South Vietnam before the South Vietnamese parliamentary elections next August and the presidential elections next October.

The enemy attacks have been directed against civilian, as well as military targets, including a district capital, Ducduc, which was burned earlier this week.